

Queen told how to do her job in open letter

By KEN COATES

Harold Evans, retired Christchurch Magistrate and now a peace campaigner on both sides of the Tasman, is no passive idealist, content only to lament the world's "inevitable" drift towards nuclear holocaust.

Mr Evans, aged 67, long noted for his liberal and outspoken views, is as active as ever, and has prepared what must be his most unusual case, for presentation to the highest authority in the Commonwealth — the Queen.

In what he styles "an open letter" to Her Majesty, he calls into question her leadership of the Commonwealth, in the areas of peace, war, armaments, and defence. It is not a line of which the British Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, would approve. Nor is it likely to find Royal favour.

Harold Evans appeals to the Queen to "positively and publicly" return to the commitments of her Coronation Oath, with the warning that unless she does, she will take herself and her people "over the brink of an abyss universal and final."

In retirement, Evans has exchanged his briefcase for a small back-pack. He is relaxed, wears open-necked shirts, reads avidly, writes prolifically, and goes running on the Port Hills.

He lives in Sydney, but every few months or so "commutes" to Christchurch where, for 12 years, he was on the Bench.

Like thousands of other citizens around the world, he is deeply concerned about the build-up of nuclear arms and the increasing tendency to solve international disputes, including sovereignty of the Falklands, by force.

An old boy of Christ's College and holder of a master's degree in

law from Victoria University, Evans's background is not of the kind usually associated with peace activists, let alone public critics of the reigning Monarch:

Served with the R.N.Z.A.F. in Britain during the Second World War; third secretary with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, secretary to the Prime Minister, and associate to Mr Justice Northcroft at the Tokyo trials of major Japanese war criminals ... His dossier reads like that of a man who without question, served his country and answered the call of duty.

But for Harold Evans this is not inconsistent with a questioning mind and an independent spirit. He has long followed a policy of candour in speaking out on public issues, whatever the embarrassments.

He has, for example, openly criticised what he saw as a political appointment to the office of Governor-General. Only four weeks ago, in a talk to a W.E.A. audience in Christchurch, he strongly criticised the Queen for using her status and influence towards a revival of nationalism.

He announced he had withdrawn his oath of allegiance to the Monarch (taken when he was made a Magistrate) and sent off a letter to the Attorney-General, Mr McLay, to tell him so.

The Minister has argued that neither Harold Evans, nor any citizen for that matter, can, as it were, cast off allegiance to the Crown, so long as he remains in the realm.

Mr McLay points out that a natural-born subject owes allegiance from birth, and the obligation arises independently of any oath taken.

He does not comment on the

AN OPEN LETTER

to

Her Majesty
Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God
Queen of New Zealand
and Her Other Realms and Territories,
Head of the Commonwealth,
Defender of the Faith

asking her to consider anew

the duties of her Office
and how she may lead her people
in the way wherein they should go

Christchurch,
New Zealand,
17 October 1983

Harold Evans

need for an oath of allegiance at all, but acknowledges what he views as Harold Evans's gesture made to emphasise views of peace, war, armaments, and defence. He does so without comment, respecting the sincerity of the views.

Details of his stand, and his reasons for taking it, were sent to the Governor General, who merely officially acknowledged their receipt, through his secretary.

This prompted Harold Evans to send his "open letter" to the Queen and characteristically he says: "It is much better that she should know what is being said about her acts of State, than that such things should be silenced or muted."

It is perhaps understandable that a retired Magistrate would turn to the Establishment and its institutions when making a protest. Others tend to dismiss them, exerting pressure from outside.

Withdrawing an oath, even symbolically, may be one thing, but calling into question the leadership quality of the reigning Monarch would, in another age, have invited a one-way trip to the Tower of London.

He has drawn on the expertise gained from years of legal and judicial work and his "open letter" is, in reality, a thick, bound dossier, painstakingly prepared.

It examines current concern among churchmen over the arms race, the Christian attitude towards

violence, and includes a wide selection of authorities for the morality of non-violence.

In a forword, Evans refers to the nuclear arms race as "today's crisis of life or death for the world's people."

He quotes at length, from the Coronation Service in which the Monarch-to-be-crowned solemnly promises "to maintain to the utmost of her power, the laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel."

Evans is convinced that the lead which the Queen is giving in the areas of peace, war, arms, and defence, is seriously at variance with that which it is her duty to give.

His argument rests on the contention that the founder of Christianity laid on his followers the imperative of non-violence.

He contends that the Queen's last Christmas message to the Commonwealth was an apology for the British Government's action in undertaking the Falklands war, and should never have been made.

The allegation is made that the Queen presented herself to the Commonwealth and the world in a spirit of pride and glorification of Britain's war of the past.

In contrast, notes Harold Evans, the Royal Christmas message for 1983 contained the theme of "true brotherhood enunciated eloquently and with manifest sincerity."